



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

Edinburgh Research Explorer

Sports Observations

Citation for published version:

Jarvie, G, Trimbur, L & Xu, J 2020, *Sports Observations: Sport, Protest and Black Lives Matter*.

Link:

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

General rights

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

Take down policy

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact openaccess@ed.ac.uk providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.





SPORT HAS ALWAYS BEEN POLITICAL: NOW IS A TIME TO LISTEN, LEARN AND ACT

Grant Jarvie, Lucia Trimbur and Yujun Xu¹

“This is a time to speak on these subjects, speak on injustice.” [Raheem Sterling]

“You need to use your voice, how big or small the platform is. I saw a quote from Dr [Martin Luther] King that said: ‘The silence of the good people is worse than the brutality of the bad people.’” [Coco Gauff]

Introduction

1. Colin Kaepernick, Coco Gauff, Lewis Hamilton, Naomi Osaka, Raheem Sterling, Megan Rapinoe, Michael Jordan, Serena Williams are but a few athletes who have not stayed silent following the death of George Floyd. They are not the first nor will they be the last to act through sport and the platform that it gives them to call out the many injustices in the world including racism. It took the footballer Marcus Rashford, with a track record of speaking out passionately about hunger and poverty, to go where current politicians feared and do the right thing. Jordan Henderson became the driving force that ignited a wave of sports philanthropy as the players together scheme raised millions for NHS charities. Different sports in different countries have all taken a knee, visibly protesting and supporting anti-racism in all its forms both in sport and beyond sport.

2. There are times when sport can and does lead. A new wave of sporting activists and philanthropists are on the march and need to be supported long after the protests fade. Sport has always been political. Athletes have always had social and political consciences. The public can't always depend on sport stars to tackle social inequality alone, nor should they. The world needs them and others.

3. No one should be surprised by the recent athletes' leadership. While often actively discouraged from critical comments, at times of crisis, many athletes take their responsibility to represent their communities very seriously. This is one such moment of crisis.

Sport has always been political

4. Almost four years have passed since former San Francisco 49ers quarterback Colin Kaepernick first protested against racial injustice in the United States of America (USA) by kneeling during the national anthem². Many athletes joined Kaepernick in his demonstration³. On 7 September 2016 National Football League (NFL) commissioner Roger Goodell stated “I don't necessarily agree with what he is doing”⁴ and on 11-12 September 2016 after Kaepernick and teammate Eric Reid took a knee during the anthem, President Trump said that such actions show “a great lack of respect and appreciation” for the US. Kaepernick lost his job and received death threats and other forms of harassment and intimidation.

5. More than 50 years have passed since Tommie Smith and John Carlos went from being celebrated to despised by many Americans. Two days after winning gold and bronze in the 200-meter sprint at the 1968 Mexico City Summer Olympic Games, both men were suspended by the United States Olympic Committee (USOC) for protesting against anti-Black racism⁵. Article 50 of the

[1] The paper was developed by Professor Grant Jarvie (University of Edinburgh) and Professor Lucia Trimbur (John Jay College of Criminal Justice and the Graduate Center, The City University of New York). We are grateful for the support and inputs provided by Professor Bruce Kidd (University of Toronto) and Hala Ousta (FIFA). The research assistant that helped with the research and production was Yujun Xu (University of Edinburgh).

[2] On the 26th of August 2016 Kaepernick sits on the bench during the national anthem before the 49er's pre-season home game against the Green Bay Packers. On the 1 September the quarterback changes his method of protesting to kneeling.

[3] See Trimbur, L (2019). 'Taking a knee, making a stand: social justice, Trump America and the politics of sport'. *Quest* Vol 71 (2):252-255 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00336297.2018.1551806>

[4] See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/american-football/52948942>

[5] See <https://www.blogs.hss.ed.ac.uk/sport-matters/2016/10/>

IOC charter states that “No kind of demonstration or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas”⁶. It is important to note that flag waiving, national anthems, and other pro-national displays, on the other hand are allowed while other forms of politics are reviewed on a case by case basis. This needs to change.

6. On any given day sport matters to millions of people around the world⁷. On any given day, sport is used politically and serves political functions. It is factually wrong, a myth, bad faith to suggest that athletes or grassroots sports people have not been successful social and political activists. What is evident is that a new generation of sporting activists are on the march.

The new sporting activists and philanthropists

7. In the United Kingdom (UK) it took the footballer Marcus Rashford to mobilise public opinion on hunger and poverty to get the UK and Scottish Parliaments to release further funding to feed children living in poverty in the summer months⁸. In the USA it took American footballer Colin Kaepernick taking a knee and subsequently losing his job to secure the right to protest against racism and police brutality to get the NFL to acknowledge and act against racism. In the USA it took American footballer Colin Kaepernick taking a knee and subsequently losing his job to secure the right to protest against racism and police brutality to get the NFL to acknowledge and act against racism. In the Scottish Parliament it took Glasgow MSP Anas Sarwar to recite professions, from government departments to academia and the judiciary, in which he said no one from a Black and ethnic minority (BAME) background held a key position⁹. The pursuit of racial equality in Scotland is one in which a recurring deficit is repeatedly identified¹⁰. In response to the UK Parliaments’ establishment of a cross-government Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities David Lammy MP asserted “Yet again in the UK, we want more

figures, more data but we don’t want action”¹¹. In the USA protest placards remind us “silence equals death.”

8. The politics of sports protest is not new. Although sport enthusiasts have at times argued otherwise, sport has always been political and rightly so. It is not as if sports’ capacity, capability, and reach to tackle social and political injustices has only just presented itself. Many things are not new. One hundred thousand Americans are dead from a virus, a feat of space flight demonstrated America’s ingenuity and athletes are protesting against racial injustices where many athletes are treated as first-class citizens when running on the track and second-class citizens outside of the sports arena. The year is 1968 but it is also 2020. The manifestations may differ but the underlying causes of injustice, disease, and racism remain and the cycle of conservative reaction has come around many times since 1968. This is not new.

9. The popularity, scale and reach of sport make it a powerful tool, perhaps like no other, in calling out and drawing attention to crimes against our universal humanity. The social and political activism of athletes, across sports, and across generations, across race, class and gender is catapulting on to the international stage, articulating the wrongs that must be righted. As sociologist Rayshawn Ray instructs us public pressure from athletes matters¹².

“*The triumph can’t be had without the struggle*”.

10. Today there is both more space for athlete activism and more spaces to be won¹³. When Barack Obama was asked by People Magazine what he thought of the basketball star LeBron James on court wearing an ‘I can’t breathe’ T-shirt he replied “I think LeBron did the right thing- We forget the role that Muhammed Ali, Arthur Ashe, Wilma Rudolph and Bill Russell played in raising consciousness...I’d like to see more athletes do that, not just around this issue, but a range of issues”[1]. At the 1960 Rome Olympics Rudolph

[6] See [IOC Charter Rule 50 Guidelines](#). Under current IOC regulations, athletes are allowed to express political opinions in official media settings or on social media but banned from doing so on the field of play, at ceremonies or in the Olympic Village.

[7] Global impact studies of sport reveal that 1 in 5 people in the world connect with sport.

[8] See **Northcroft, J (2020)**. ‘The new philanthropists’. The Sunday Times, 21 June:7.

[9] See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-scotland-politics-48730618>

[10] See **Meer, N. (2019)**. ‘The opportunities and obstacles for a Scottish approach to race equality’ <https://www.race.ed.ac.uk/the-opportunities-and-obstacles-for-a-scottish-approach-to-race-equality/>

[11] See **Line, H. (2020)**. ‘Johnson racism pledge back of a fag packet plan’. The Scotsman, 16 June: 13.

[12] See **Rayshaw, R. (2020)** <https://twitter.com/GlobalSportMtrs/status/1265724534902140934>. Twitter, May 27, 2020.

[13] See **Boykoff, J. (2016)**. Power games a political history of the Olympic Games. London: Verso. 252.

[14] See ‘The Obamas talk to People: We can still make a difference’. People, December 29, 2014:59.

became the first American women to ever take home three gold medals at a single Olympic Games. When she returned to her hometown of Clarksville, the city planned a segregated parade for her, in which she refused to participate unless it was integrated – the town responded but the experience reminded younger athletes that the triumph can't be had without the struggle¹⁵.

“I think they are great role models in that sense of just truly having a voice”

11. Listen to the voice of golfer Cheyenne Woods talking about her father. “He thought I could be one of the first consistent, dominant black women on the LPGA. To this day his words are in my head. What he believed I could be is something I still think about”¹⁶ ...; or talking about the protests” I am encouraged by the protests. People are able to be heard and things are actually starting now”¹⁷. She continued “I think as an athlete or a public figure, a lot of times you almost get forced to feel like you have to live middle-of-the-road and not go one way or another or say anything too extreme,”¹⁸. She further reflected, “But there comes a point where you have to have a voice and you have to speak on what matters to you because it does make a difference in people’s lives and can influence and spread a lot of positivity and change. ... You see athletes like LeBron James and Steph Curry speak out about these issues and it’s very powerful to see somebody in that light have such a strong stance on something that matters to them. I think they are great role models in that sense of just truly having a voice”¹⁹. In 1997, her uncle won the US Masters and donned the green jacket that accompanied the winning of the title. On the hallowed putting greens of Augusta, where Tiger Woods would not have been allowed membership a few years earlier.

12. Or voices of racing drivers like Lewis Hamilton from Formula 1 racing who asked what do you do about the fact that people of colour are treated

differently every day? The world champion went on “seeing George Floyd’s murder triggered a deep sense of pain, anguish and frustration” ...” this is not a new battle for me I’ve been fighting the stigma of racism throughout my racing career”. He went on “everyone has a journey of purpose and confronted with what Martin Luther King Jr described as the fierce urgency of now, these past weeks have made mine much clearer ...I want to channel my energy, influence and investment to create a more inclusive world ... for me that journey begins with education”²⁰.

13. The Hamilton Commission launched by F1's six-time world champion hopes to help drive "real, tangible and measurable change" in F1 and motorsport. Writing in his column for The Sunday Times the driver stated that “despite my success in the sport the institutional barriers that have kept F1 exclusive persist”²¹. He went on “it is not enough to point to me or a single new Black hire, as a meaningful example of progress. Thousands of people are employed across the industry and that group needs to be more representative of society”²². Furthermore, “For this reason, I have been working with The Royal Academy of Engineering to create the Hamilton Commission, a research partnership dedicated to exploring how motor sport can be used as a vehicle to engage more young people from Black backgrounds with Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) subjects and, ultimately employ them on our teams or in other engineering sectors”²³.

“This is a time to speak on these subjects, speak on injustice, especially in my field”

14. Or voices from football including Raheem Sterling. “It’s not just taking the knee, it is about giving people the chance they deserve” ... He argued “This is a time to speak on these subjects, speak on injustice, especially in my field,”²⁴. During lockdown Sterling aligned himself with Megan Rapinoe, the US footballer who has become a spokesperson of global significance

[15] See Plowden, M. (1996). Olympic Black Women. Louisiana: Pelican Publishing.

[16] See Murray, E. (2020). ‘Golf is still very much dominated by white males- the history is deep’. The Guardian 20 June:12.

[17] See Murray, E. (2020). ‘Golf is still very much dominated by white males- the history is deep’. The Guardian 20 June: 12.

[18] See Murray, E. (2020). ‘Golf is still very much dominated by white males- the history is deep’. The Guardian 20 June: 12.

[19] See Culpepper, J. (2020). <https://golfweek.usatoday.com/2020/06/02/harold-varner-iii-george-floyd-looting-injustice-black-lives-matter-pga-tour/>

[20] See Sky Sports (2020) ‘Lewis Hamilton hits out at F1 for silence over George Floyd death’ <https://www.skysports.com/f1/news/12433/11998373/lewis-hamilton-hits-out-at-f1-for-silence-over-george-floyd-death>

Westerby, J (2020) ‘mum sold wedding ring for my career’ The Times 23 June: 54.

[21] See [Lewis Hamilton on racism and the need for diversity in motorsport](#).

[22] See [Lewis Hamilton on racism and the need for diversity in motorsport](#).

[23] See [Lewis Hamilton on racism and the need for diversity in motorsport](#).

[24] See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/52972621>

equal pay and gay rights²⁵. Rapinoe argued that “Being a gay American, I know what it means to look at the flag and not have it protect all of your liberties,”²⁶. Rapinoe told American Soccer Now of taking the knee. “It was something small that I could do and something that I plan to keep doing in the future and hopefully spark some meaningful conversation around it. It’s important to have white people stand in support of people of colour on this. We don’t need to be the leading voice, of course, but standing in support of them is something that’s really powerful”²⁷. The US women’s football team, who have historically featured mostly white players, eventually demanded their federation overturn rules which ban players from kneeling during the national anthem – a protest aimed at highlighting police brutality against Black communities²⁸. On Wednesday, 10 June 2020 US Soccer dropped the rule, admitting it was “wrong” and formally apologised. On June 28, the entire rosters of the two competing teams in the opening game of the Challenge Cup of the National Women’s Soccer League took a knee to “protest racial injustice, police brutality and systemic racism against Black people and people of colour in America. We love our country and we have taken this opportunity to hold it to a higher standard” they said²⁹.

15. After being appointed as assistant manager in January and manager in June 2020 Alex Dyer and talking about the experience of becoming one of the few Black football managers to be appointed manager of a Scottish Premier League Football Club stated “It is a subject that is always going to be there. I am a Black man who is working in an industry where there is not many Black coaches and I hope that me being a coach and now a Black manager, that will open doors for others”. “I am not naive, I know that in the past people have been turned down for jobs for the reason of their colour. We know that has happened but we still have to keep knocking down the door”³⁰. The Scotland manager Steve Clarke who worked with Dyer

at Kilmarnock asserted that “something needs to change if football’s anti-racism protests are to succeed We have to make sure that Black people get the same opportunities”³¹.

16. When the English Premier League restarted its current season, players wore jerseys with “Black Lives Matter” above their numbers. All 20 clubs agreed to wear BLM jerseys for the first 12 matches, and on the first day of the re-opening, athletes took a knee in further solidarity. A Premier League allegedly so hostile to discourse of politics, ethics and human rights, allowing clubs, some of whom have been purchased by nation states, now aligns itself publicly against systemic racism. Admittedly the Saudi-Arabia v Qatar wealth battle over the potential purchase of Newcastle United Football Club remains problematic but while the step taken by the FA to change its stance on protests is a small step, it is not insignificant and could put pressure on other organisations. Will the IOC follow? In January, the IOC announced that it would amend Rule 50 to allow athletes to make political statements at media interviews, conferences and public venues during the Games, but preserve the prohibition against such statements on the field of play and during medal ceremonies. The reach of the current protests is so long that there is now discussion of revoking Rule 50 altogether. As several athletes from around the world have eloquently said, it would be entirely contradictory for the IOC to stop athletes from speaking out on the Olympic principles of racial equality and justice³².

“Even when I was world No4 I had no clothing deal”

17. Zina Garrison lost to Martina Navratilova 6-4, 6-1 in the 1990 Wimbledon final. Garrison was 26 and had been a top player for at least eight years. She won a doubles gold medal with Pam Shriver and a singles bronze at the 1988 Olympics in Seoul and finished her career with 14 singles titles and 587 career wins³³. Talking of the struggles of being a Black tennis player during the 80s and 90s Garrison stated “For five years,

[25] See **Northcroft, J (2020)**. ‘The new philanthropists’. The Sunday Times. 21 June:7.

[26] See [US women's soccer team call for repeal of national anthem protest policy](#).

[27] See [US women's soccer team call for repeal of national anthem protest policy](#).

[28] See [US women's soccer team call for repeal of national anthem protest policy](#).

[29] Associated Press. ‘Women’s soccer players take a knee during national anthem’. June 28, 2020. https://lmtribune.com/sports/women-s-soccer-players-take-a-knee-during-national-anthem/article_ef91cfdc-9ad8-59fd-8d80-f7d3ced0add0.html.

[30] See <https://www.eveningexpress.co.uk/sport/kilmarnock-boss-alex-dyer-hoping-to-inspire-other-black-coaches/>

[31] See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/53179549>

[32] **Paul McGaughey**. ‘Olympian Damien Warner says IOC on the ‘Wrong side of history’ with protest ban. <https://www.cbc.ca/sports/olympics/summer/trackandfield/damian-warner-interview-olympics-protest-1.5609694>

[33] See **Carayol, T. (2020)**. ‘Even when I was world NO4 I had no clothing deal’. The Observer. 28 June:12.

even when I made it to the top four in the world, I still had no clothing deal³⁴ “I was very aware of what was going on and I was always told: ‘if you make it to this ranking, you’ll get a deal’ ... you had white girls behind me, they’re making way more money and their ranking or consistency wasn’t even there”³⁵. At Wimbledon, Martina Navratilova had gifted her clothes from her Nike line.

18. Today when Coco Gauff and Naomi Osaka speak the truth to power they are continuing the struggle of those who have gone before them such as Althea Gibson, Lori McNeil, the Williams sisters, Zina Garrison not to mention Evonne Goolagong and other tennis women who broke down barriers. Speaking in the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd, Coco Gauff, called for change and urged people around the world not to say silent. Poignantly she asserted “I am with my grandma. It’s sad that I am protesting the same thing that she did fifty-plus years ago”³⁶.

19. Or voices from GB athletics such as Imani Lansiquot who calls the moment a “time of awakening” and has again been ignited to “take an active stand against racism”³⁷. Talking in the aftermath of the murder of George Floyd the athlete went on “This past week has probably been one of the hardest I’ve been through as a young Black woman and athlete. When I was a little girl, the world I imagined growing up in was governed by blind justice. Justice that is impartial and objective to race. However, like LeBron James she said, I feel it was time to be more than just an athlete”³⁸.

20. Members of the British Olympic Association’s Athletics Commission have called upon potential Tokyo-bound athletes to tell them about their concerns. This is in a bid to pressure the way in which the IOC will address the issues in Japan. The Commission chair Ben Hawes wrote “We are pleased the IOC has moved to condemn racism in the strongest terms and has requested its IOC Athletes Commission to open dialogue with the world’s athletes to explore

ways in which we can best express our support for the principles of the Olympic charter”³⁹. He went on “With the full support of the leadership of the BOA we wish to represent the views of British Olympic athletes to the IOC’s athletics commission and other forums”⁴⁰.

“We, the National Football League, condemn racism and the systematic oppression of black people”

21. Consciousness is changing quickly. Athletes, coaches, sporting bodies, and fans at every level of play are both demanding support for Black Lives Matter and pledging their own solidarity with the movement. American football alone has seen dramatic and well-organized action by players and a significant about-face from the professional league. On June 4, Saquon Barkley, running back for the NY Giants, posted a video of prominent and popular Black players asking the NFL to affirm that Black lives—and their lives—matter. The athletes ask, “It’s been 10 days since George Floyd was brutally murdered. How many times do we need to ask you to listen to your players? What will it take? For one of us to be murdered by police brutality? What if I was George Floyd?”⁴¹. The video ends with players calling for the league to publicly support Black Lives Matter and uphold their right to protest. They assert, “On behalf of the National Football League, this is what we, the players, would like to hear you state: ‘We, the National Football League, condemn racism and the systematic oppression of Black people. We, the National Football League, admit wrong in silencing our players from peacefully protesting. We, the National Football League, believe Black Lives Matter’”⁴².

22. Roger Goodell, the NFL Commissioner who oversaw the NFL’s disastrous campaign to marginalise Colin Kaepernick for his protest in the 2016-2017 season, immediately responded. Without consulting team owners - a highly unusual practice- Goodell released a statement acknowledging the league’s failure to recognize and address anti-Black racism in

[34] See Carayol, T. (2020). ‘Even when I was world NO4 I had no clothing deal’. The Observer.28 June:12.

[35] See Carayol, T. (2020). ‘Even when I was world NO4 I had no clothing deal’. The Observer.28 June:12.

[36] Watch Coco Gauff’s speech [here](#).

[37] See [Imani Lansiquot on George Floyd protest and fighting for Black lives Matter](#).

[38] See [Imani Lansiquot on George Floyd protest and fighting for Black lives Matter](#).

[39] See A full version of the letter of 14 June 2020 can be viewed [here](#).

[40] See A full version of the letter of 14 June 2020 can be viewed [here](#).

[41] See Saquon Barkley, Odell Beckham, other stars demand NFL ‘condemn racism,’ say ‘black lives matter’ in powerful video [here](#).

[42] See Saquon Barkley, Odell Beckham, other stars demand NFL ‘condemn racism,’ say ‘black lives matter’ in powerful video [here](#).

the league⁴³. Reciting the players' request nearly word for word, he added, "Without Black players, there would be no National Football League, and the protests around the country are emblematic of the centuries of silence, inequality and oppression of Black players, coaches, fans and staff... We are listening. I am listening. And I will be reaching out to players who have raised their voices and others on how we can improve and go forward for a better and more united NFL family"⁴⁴.

23. Though Kaepernick was conspicuously absent from Goodell's statement, he remains the shadow-figure of all discussions on racial oppression and anti-racist struggle. And although not all felt that Goodell's long-awaited declaration that NFL athletes do possess the right to protest was made in good faith, it nonetheless is an important public admission from a league long-committed to suppressing and punishing any utterance of dissent. Goodell's words were not only unthinkable in 2016 when Kaepernick first took a knee; they were unthinkable three months ago.

24. In the USA, the NFL is not the only sporting league where athletes are demanding action from their organizing bodies nor is it only Black athletes who are participating in and committed to the struggle against racism and racial brutality. At the University of Southern California (USC), a coalition of black athletes and allies formed a new organization called the United Black Student-Athletes Association (UBSAA) and issued a three-page list of demands for the university and its athletic director. Among them was a statement of support for Black Lives Matter and initiatives to increase the number of Black staff in athletics⁴⁵. At the University of Texas-Austin, a multiracial group of student-athletes issued a statement refusing to participate in recruitment activities or donor-related activities until the university, among other things, acknowledges its systemic racism and takes concrete anti-racist measures, such as renaming buildings, changing the school song, and educating all incoming students on the history of race and racism⁴⁶. At the University of California- Los Angeles the men's football

team recently released a statement expressing their doubt that the university had their best interests in mind when developing a university COVID policy⁴⁷.

What is not new?

25. It would be a mistake to see these extraordinary events as something entirely new because, of course, athletes have always protested. More importantly, this particular wave of rebellion is a direct response to the brutal yet ordinary murders of Black people by police officers, which have plagued the US throughout the country's history. The ability to recount a list, not even close to exhaustive, of people killed with impunity by state actors in recent years- George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery, Manuel Ellis, Breonna Taylor, Walter Scott, Tony McDade, Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Samuel DuBose, Trayvon Martin, Freddie Gray, Laquan MacDonald, Tamir Rice, Frank Smart, Phillip White, Jordan Baker- reflects the enduring power of white supremacy, genocide, and colonialism on which the US was founded. The criminal justice system is by no means the only site of anti-Black racism. Slow death pervades racial medicine and health care, underfunded and segregated public schools, unequal access to food and basic nutrition, inadequate housing and racial segregation.

26. The experiences of Black Americans in the legal system and with law enforcement reveal one of the most glaring sites of anti-Black racism and racial terror with deep roots in plantation slavery. Study after study shows that Black Americans endure racism at every step of the criminal justice system, from initial contact with the police to sentencing to parole decisions. They are arrested at higher rates for drug use, possession, and intent to distribute despite similar, if not lower, rates of use, possession, and selling than whites. In 2018, for example, around 750 out of every 100,000 Black Americans were arrested for drug use, compared to around 350 out of every 100,000 white Americans, again despite similar rates of use. Black Americans are imprisoned at five times the rate of white Americans and at almost twice the rate of Latinx men and women despite similar rates of criminal involvement. Most

[43] See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/american-football/53060840>.

[44] See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/american-football/53060840>.

[45] See **Kartje, R. (2020)**. 'USC student athletes form organization to combat racial equality'. The Los Angeles Times. 17 June – See [here](#).

[46] See **Justin, R. (2020)**. 'UT Austin football players demand school rename buildings named after racist figures, donate to Black Lives Matter'. 12 June – See [here](#).

[47] See **McCullough, B. (2020)**. 'UCLA Football Players demand protection from injustices amid Pandemic return'. – The Los Angeles Times. 19 June – See [here](#).

importantly, Black citizens are more likely to have fatal encounters with law enforcement than their Latinx and white counterparts. In 2019, Black Americans constituted under 14% of the population but accounted for more than 23% of the 1,000 plus fatal shootings by the police. Murder by police remains one of the top causes of mortality among young Black men⁴⁸.

27. While protests in the USA against the murder of George Floyd ignited new rounds of anger as well as protest across public and private arenas the responses spilled across borders and people took to the streets in cities internationally in solidarity. In the UK there is no shortage of evidence, commissions and reports on racial inequality. In August 2016 the Race Disparity Audit aimed to show how people from ethnic minorities were treated differently in public services⁴⁹. The audit produced a series of reports. The McGregor-Smith Review looked at race in the workplace. The Parker Review looked at the ethnic diversity, or lack of it, on corporate boards⁵⁰. The picture painted by such reports shows disturbing patterns. Asian and Black households are more likely to be poor when compared with white households; one in ten adults from a Black, Pakistani or Bangladeshi background is unemployed compared to one twenty-five white British people. Black people are overwhelmingly more likely to be stopped and searched by the police. There is no shortage of evidence; what has been lacking is action.

28. Commenting on Scotland, Scotland's Makar, Jackie Kay stated in August 2019 that while Scotland was very different in the 1970s it still has not changed enough as far as race goes⁵¹. She goes on that in Scotland it still seems to be acceptable to keep on asking people where they are from in a way that you would just not do with a Black Liverpoolian or Brummie or Londoner. This observation was supported by the Bishop of St Andrews, Dunkeld and Dunblane who told his parishioners "that racism exists here as well as America" and that "Black and Asian people in Scotland are constantly asked – where do you come from?"⁵².

29. It would also be a mistake to see the new wave of sporting activists and philanthropists as standing alone against racism, including racism in sport. This is also not new. US athletes such as of Jesse Owens, Tommie Smith, John Carlos, Muhammad Ali, Tydie Pickett, Louise Stokes, Vonetta Flowers and Alice Cochrane all had to struggle against racial injustice and inequality.

30. Nor is this just the USA⁵³. In New Zealand at the 1990 Commonwealth Games in Auckland, a 16-year-old Catherine Astrid Salome Freeman became the first Aboriginal Australian to win a Commonwealth gold medal in track and field. The following year she was named young Australian of the Year. She became a symbol of reconciliation between a Black and white Australia in which she had much to forgive⁵⁴. As Cathy Freeman held the Olympic torch aloft during the opening ceremony of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, a games at which she won gold in the 400 meters, she did so in a different Australia from the one experienced by her parents.

31. Freeman became a symbol of reconciliation between a Black and white Australia in which she had much to forgive⁵⁵. Her grandmother, Alice Sibley, was one of the so-called stolen generation, taken from her parents at the age of eight by a reviled Australian government policy that was supposedly designed to help integration. As a consequence of this 1950s programme which saw Aboriginal children removed from their parents and settled with white families, Freeman remained unaware of her ancestry on her mother's side. Her father, an outstanding footballer, left home when she was five, died of an alcohol-induced stroke aged 53. She was sexually abused at 11 and later abused by whites. The Olympic reception following her victory in the final of the 400 metres stood in stark contrast to the day she travelled to an athletics meeting aged 13. Waiting outside Melbourne's Flinders Street Station, she was ordered to move on by a group of middle-aged white women, when the whole adjacent seating area lay vacant⁵⁶.

[48] See 'The fire this time'. The Economist. June 6-12, 2020:7.

[49] See 'Race to the Top' The Times. 16 June 2020:25.

[50] See [The Parker Review reports slow progress on diversification on UK business boards](#).

[51] See 'Racism in Scotland must be eradicated'. The Scotsman. 18 June 2020:28.

[52] See **Horne, M. (2020)** 'White supremacist Scots must change'. The Times 23 June .15.

[53] See **Jarvie, G, Thornton, J and Mackie, H (2018)**. Sport, culture and society. London: Routledge.

[54] See **Gillon, D. (2003)**. 'A winner who had to admit defeat'. The Herald 19 July:15.

[55] See **Jarvie, G, Thornton, J and Mackie, H (2018)**. Sport, culture and society. London: Routledge:271.

[56] See **Jarvie, G, Thornton, J and Mackie, H (2018)**. Sport, culture and society. London: Routledge:271.

32. The potential of sport to make a difference, carry a message, deliver statements on a scale that few other areas of public life can, support movements, including interracial movements, provide a platform for social and political advocacy as well as support a new generation of sporting activists should not be underestimated. Statements cannot exist without action. Equality is hard fought. Athletes know this and in many cases are explicitly showing the way. The experiences of racism in different contexts are different but the reactions to murder of George Floyd have ignited a degree of unity beyond borders and beyond any single sport or industry or sector of society. So, what can be done?

Listening, learning and acting: what can be done?

33. Since the death of George Floyd, a number of calls have been made, some of which are new. Large scale demands for structural, institutional and individual actions against racism are being made by athletes in a variety of sporting spaces. The voices of ordinary people are making the difference, not the suits, not the politicians, and not the all-white boards. While the wealth of some contemporary sports stars may set them apart, the new wave of activism is driven by everyday athletes, many of them unknown until now, across countries. When sport returns and the COVID lockdowns ease, it is imperative to keep momentum.

All who care about humanity need to keep this alive. It is the voices of ordinary people who are saying enough is enough.

34. One of the consequences of lockdown during COVID 19 is that many, not all, have had time to reflect upon the world we live in, see our common humanity, care about our interdependence and decide on different futures, especially but not only for racial justice. Sport and society have failed to deal with racism up until now. Sport is but one institution that has failed to engage adequately in anti-racist struggle but it is well positioned to demand racial and social inequality. Some necessary interventions are not hard to achieve. Remedying the lack of BAME coaches in sport x or y in country x or y is a sort of issue that could be fixed fairly quickly if the political will is mobilised to address the issue. Equally addressing the lack of non-

white directors in, for example, American and British sporting bodies or the lack of Black chief executives or owners is also feasible, again, with political will.

35. Institutions need to change. At minimum they must meet the demands of US university athletes: (i) recruit and foster the development of staff of colour and from diverse class and gender backgrounds- coaches, general managers, academics; (ii) protect athletes from retaliation when they protest and defend academic freedom and free speech rights when they are threatened by governmental bodies and private actors; (iii) rename stadiums, buildings, mascots, and songs that are racist or have racist undertones and replace with inclusive and diverse versions; (iv) alter statues of figures with histories of racism in order to tell the whole story and produce far more diverse figures created by sculptors and artists of colour; (v) research and provide reparations for active role and complicity in slavery; and (vi) consider new and old land acknowledgements that could include substantive measures for institutions to make restitution for their role in the dispossession of land from Indigenous peoples and others.

36. Curriculums need to change. So many calls for education in the past have failed to deliver on formal or non-formal, mainstream and or alternative forms of education about social inequality including ant-racist education. History of race and racism courses could be taught to all first-year students and all students could have proficiency in knowledge of race and ethnicity to graduate. All future scientists researching aspects of sport, but not just sport, should have exposure to social sensitizing concepts as well as substantive data about inequality in sport and/or society as compulsory parts of the curriculum. Many professional sport and exercise associations and national sports agencies have produced statements on COVID 19 but stayed silent on Black Lives Matter.

37. Boards need to change. There is not just a social and political imperative for sports boards to be more representative of the communities they represent but a substantial body of evidence demonstrates that having diverse boards boosts recruitment, retention and productivity while reducing risk. Powerful groups with

limited diversity of experience and thought can hinder progress. Furthermore, perhaps this is an area where sport could lead. For example, in the UK 2011 census reported that 3% of Britain's population were Black. On the opening day of the 2017-18 season 33% of Premier League players were Black, Asian or minority ethnic. A huge opportunity exists to remove the barriers and convert this ratio into more, much more, managers, chief executives, Chairs of Boards and much more⁵⁷.

38. More sporting events need to change so that they can carry social and political messages. Events should encourage fan awareness and implement zero tolerance policies for racist actions in the stands.

39. The IOC charter needs to change. As previously mentioned, John Carlos and Tommie Smith raised their fists on the medal podium at the 1968 Mexico Olympic City Games to protest racial inequality in the US. Although their actions echoed the Olympic Movement's rhetorical commitment against racial discrimination, they were sent home for violating rules that ban such protests. In the wake of the global demonstrations against racial injustice, the IOC has recently expressed a willingness to rethink those rules. John Carlos is not alone in wanting to abolish the rules that bans protests at the Olympics⁵⁸. The renowned Olympic protester has written a letter with an influential group of American athletes, calling on the IOC to devise a new policy. IOC article 50 has to change.

40. Change cannot stop with sport. Corporate Britain must also take responsibility for histories of exclusion and use data to address inequality. Bank of England statistics show that white residents are paid on average 10% more than ethnic minority colleagues⁵⁹. Only 5 FTSE 100 chief executives form an ethnic minority. 37% of FTSE companies with no ethnic minority board members and 0 Black women leading top 260 listed firms in the US, UK and Canada. In February 2020 in an update from the Parker Review – a government backed report into ethnic diversity in boardrooms showed that BAME people held only 16.8% of director

positions across the FTSE 350 index⁶⁰. Less than Only 0.5% of the Chairs of Scottish Governing bodies are non-white while BAME communities make up at least 4% of the population of Scotland⁶¹. Leadership positions and boards in Scottish sport are almost entirely white. UK Black business leaders wrote to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, asking for an end to racial inequality in finance but also credit provision to BAME entrepreneurs. Their requests must be heard.

41. Change must extend to colleges and universities. Universities and Colleges have responsibilities to not only the health of their own workforce but also the communities surrounding their campuses. It is not enough for colleges and universities to be just good neighbours. Those that run hospitals have a particular responsibility to devote resources to eliminating health disparities. Many take this responsibility seriously but more needs to be done. We can learn from the community activists who won a protracted campaign for the University of Chicago to open an adult trauma centre in 2018, the first on the city's South Side in three decades⁶². Such measures constitute concrete means to reverse the displacement and dispossession caused by institutions that have directly and indirectly advanced gentrification.

Let's not forget these are all political choices

42. Choosing not to feed the hungry is a political choice, choosing not to call out every day racism and ignore anti-racism is a political choice, choosing not to meet the basic needs of residents is political choice and selecting the messages that are attached to major sporting events is a political choice. The deep-rooted political hostility to social spending and health care in the US and the UK is a political choice. The suggestion that sport is apolitical is a political choice.

43. The new sports activists and philanthropists need to be listened to, supported and followed with action. The world is a better place because of the actions of Marcus Rashford, Megan Rapinoe, Colin Kaepernick, Raheem Sterling, Cheyenne Woods, Jordan Henderson, Lewis

[57] See **Graeme Souness** 'We can lead the anti-racism fight' The Sunday Times, 28 June 2020:13.

[58] **CBC News 27 June 2020**.

[59] See **Davies, B (2020)** 'Firms wake up to race issue, but sceptics say action speaks louder than hashtags'. The Observer 21 June, 49.

[60] See **Davies, B (2020)** 'Firms wake up to race issue, but sceptics say action speaks louder than hashtags'. The Observer 21 June, 49.

[61] See Who is in board in Scottish sport? Who is on board in Scottish sport? <https://www.blogs.hss.ed.ac.uk/sport-matters/2019/05/30/who-is-on-board-in-scottish-sport/>

[62] See [here](#).

Hamilton, Andy Murray, as well as hundreds of university athletes organising every day at colleges across the USA. In the UK Rashford illustrated how to make a single issue a straightforward matter of conscience. Raheem Sterling went on Newsnight to speak compellingly about Black Lives Matter and structural racism. They and many others represent a new wave of sports activism. The new generation is savvy with social media, and in some senses inspired by a North America in which there is more of a tradition of athletes becoming social and political activists.

The world can't depend on athlete's alone to change the world

44. However, it is not feasible to expect or suggest that sport despite its popularity, scale and reach can transform society alone. The world and the public can't always depend upon athletic celebrities to galvanise sports, popularity, wealth, scale and reach to tackle social inequality, nor should it⁶³. Political parties can't depend on young footballers and celebrities taking it upon themselves to campaign for social inequality and the public can't afford to. But they could recognise that they are contributing in a powerful way and politicians can follow their lead.

45. The organisation of society, the economy and social care for ordinary people needs to change. The gap between rich and poor needs to change. This is not new but if anything should be learned from the most recent pandemic and Black Lives Matters campaign it is that both have affected sectors of the community and in particular BAME communities disproportionately. Part of the problem and part of the solution lies in systemic change, in the pursuit of social capital to be valued as much if not more than economic capital. We need social contracts that create stronger, more connected societies. These too are political choices.

Additional Information

46. The Academy of Sport is a dedicated international think tank. Two premises guide our work: That sport has a part to play in addressing the challenges that face humanity in the 21st Century and to be seen to be actively addressing such challenges.

47. Any enquiries about this paper should be addressed to: [Academy of Sport](#) University of Edinburgh, Scotland, UK.

48. The paper was developed by Professor Grant Jarvie (University of Edinburgh) and Professor Lucia Trimbur (John Jay College of Criminal Justice and the Graduate Center, City University of New York). We are grateful for the support and inputs provided by Professor Bruce Kidd (University of Toronto) and Hala Ousta (FIFA). The research assistant that helped with the research and production was Yujun Xu (University of Edinburgh).

49. The authors are grateful for the support provided through [Moray House School of Education and Sport](#). The School statement of 5 June 2020 following the killing of George Floyd can be found [here](#).

[63] See Waddell, L (2020). 'Public can't depend on celebrities to tackle social inequality'. The Scotsman 18 June:28.